

The complaint

Mr T complains that Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax stopped him from making card payments and cash withdrawals when he travelled abroad.

What happened

Prior to travelling to Thailand, Mr T visited his local branch and asked if he would be able to use his debit cards as normal. During this conversation, the adviser reassured him that he wouldn't experience any problems and there was nothing he needed to do differently. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case, as on a number of occasions Mr T's transactions were declined and he needed to use a credit card instead.

When Mr T called Bank of Scotland, they explained that there were no fraud restrictions or blocks on his accounts. So, the problem was likely to be caused by the machine he was using, exceeding a spending limit or a problem with the chip in the card. They offered to send him a new card but then realised this wouldn't solve the problem as he was in Thailand as part of an extended trip.

When Mr T complained to Bank of Scotland a few months later, the complaint handler paid Mr T £50 compensation. He said he didn't identify any bank errors in relation to the reasons some of his transactions were declined. However, he did think the adviser in branch could have done more to warn him that different spending limits may apply. He explained that the standard international limit for contactless payments is £40, but depending on the specific country there could also be other local restrictions. Lastly, he said the adviser in the fraud team could have shown more empathy and chosen different words instead of simply saying there wasn't a problem with Mr T's card.

Mr T didn't accept this resolution, so an investigator at this service considered the complaint. She partially upheld it as she didn't think Bank of Scotland were responsible for the declined transactions, but she felt £100 compensation was a more appropriate amount to reflect the distress and inconvenience that was caused by the customer service failings.

Bank of Scotland accepted the investigator's opinion, but Mr T didn't. He didn't give any reasons for this, other than stating that he didn't think the investigator's outcome was fair.

So, I have considered the complaint afresh.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

I'm aware that since making this complaint, Mr T has raised new concerns about the way Bank of Scotland have treated him recently. However, I haven't addressed those issues here as they do not form part of this complaint.

Bank of Scotland have provided me with a list of all the declined transactions associated with

Mr T's current accounts while he visited Thailand. This information shows that there were several declined transactions associated with one of Mr T's accounts. I appreciate Mr T has said both of his accounts were impacted, but that isn't supported by the records I have seen.

I have also reviewed the reason codes associated with each of the declined transactions to help me understand what happened, and can see they support the detailed explanation Bank of Scotland have previously shared with Mr T. I won't repeat that explanation here. However, in brief summary, the payments were declined either because the merchant used the magnetic strip instead of chip and pin, a spending limit had been reached or there was a problem with the card's chip. Bank of Scotland have also shown there were no fraud blocks or restrictions on Mr T's account and there is no dispute, he didn't experience any problems with his card before he left the UK. So, I'm satisfied the problems Mr T experienced while abroad fell largely outside of Bank of Scotland's control.

That said, it's clear Bank of Scotland could have done more to support Mr T and ensure he was better prepared for his trip. This includes not warning him that different spending limits may apply, and the lack of empathy that was shown by the call handler in the fraud team. I was pleased to see that Bank of Scotland have already acknowledged these customer service failings. However, like our Investigator, having carefully considered all of the circumstances, and timescales involved, I think £100 is a more appropriate amount to fairly reflect the impact of these issues.

I appreciate Mr T travels regularly and feels strongly that Bank of Scotland should provide him with a guarantee he won't experience similar problems again in the future. However, this isn't something I would expect any bank to do. Bank of Scotland have explained that their standard international daily limit for contactless transactions is £40, so he may wish to bear this in mind. Mr T can also request advice before travelling and take a backup source of payment with him, as he did here, as a precaution.

My final decision

I uphold this complaint and direct Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax to pay Mr T £100 compensation in total – if they haven't already done so.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr T to accept or reject my decision before 13 April 2026.

Claire Greene
Ombudsman